Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MUSICAL TIMES,
And Singing Class Circular.
JULY 1st, 1860.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE VOCAL SHAKE,

With Exercises for obtaining that indispensable ornament,

By MRS. BLAINE HUNT.*

THE few following observations are intended merely for persons, who, having made some advance in the Art of Singing, are desirous of acquiring facility in the execution of that most graceful of all embellishments—the Shake. They are the result of a considerable and successful experience in the course of the Author's professional instructions to her pupils.

The method she has long used with so much advantage, having been approved of by those who are competent to judge of its utility, she is induced at their request, as well as at the solicitation of some who have profited by her system, to give to the Public some exemplification of the mode she has adopted for accomplishing this desirable object.

She does not profess, in the following pages, to give any, even elementary, treatise on the art of singing in general; on this head she could scarcely have added anything new to the many Books of Instruction already published. She has merely confined herself to the single point announced in the Title.

She trusts that however trifling the extent to which these observations run,—occupying as they do only a very few pages,—yet, that the observations themselves will not be considered either trifling or unuseful.

Her object has not been to write a book, but to assist in developing the powers of the young Singer, in the attainment of the most beautiful, most essential, and at the same time most neglected of the graces in Music.

It is not a little singular that many otherwise accomplished singers fail to obtain a mastery over the Shake; and yet so essential is this ornament, that even inferior singers who can use it with facility, leave a more favorable impression with their audience, and carry off more applause than many a first-rate artist, who is deficient in this acquirement.

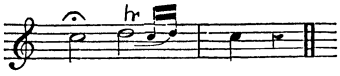
Whatever may be the cause, the fact at least is undoubted,—that the pleasurable emotion excited by a clear and well-sustained Shake is almost universal; the most untutored as well as the most cultivated ear receiving equal delight from its execution.

It thus holds, as if by the common consent of mankind, the chief rank among the ornaments of Music: and what is peculiar to this species of embellishments is that it is equally applicable to the cantabile and severe Church style, as it is to the more florid kind of composition. That so few persons, therefore, should attain excellence in the vocal performance of this grace, must in a great measure be ascribed to the defective method of learning to overcome the difficulty.

Many, no doubt, have been gifted by nature with an organ capable of executing a clear and melodious Shake almost spontaneously; but by far the greater number can only acquire it by long and well-directed practice. To such as these the subsequent hints may, it is thought, be found serviceable, for where a wrong method is at first adopted, the vicious habits engendered become almost incurable.

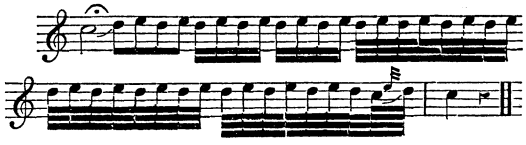
The principal employment of the Shake is as a cadence at the close of a period, serving to announce the final repose in the descent from the Second (taken as the fifth of the Dominant in the Harmony) to the Key-note.

Ex:



In this way it is used in almost all Handel's sacred songs. In English Ballads, where the distinct and rhythmical enunciation of the words is as essential to the gratification of the hearer as the pure intonation of the melody, the Shake is the principal ornament; and even in some of our English Bravuras, it constitutes the chief cadence. As for instance, Bishop's song "Lo here the gentle Lark," and many other of his excellent compositions. (See Examples pages 10 and 11 of Folio edition.)

When the Shake is used as a Cadence, it must always commence on the principal note, and alternate with the note above,—that is, the lower of the two notes constituting the Shake must be struck first. For example, the Shake given above as an instance of a Cadence, must be executed thus:—



But though the principal employment of the Shake is, as before stated, by way of Cadence at the close, this is by no means the only use to which it is applied. It is also introduced as a passing ornament upon particular notes both ascending and descending in the middle of the Air. Indeed, the Italians seldom employ it at the close, but not unfrequently use it as a passing grace in the course of the melody. They employ two kinds, namely, what they call a Catena di trille, or a chain of Shakes, and a mere short passing Shake, called Mordente.

It is necessary to remark here, that when the note, on which the Shake is employed merely as an ornament in the middle of the song, ascends dia-

* Abridged from the Folio edition, and reprinted in the *Musical Times* by permission of Mr. J. Alfred Novello.

tonically to a note above, the Shake must be commenced on the upper note, and alternate with the principal note,—that is, the upper of the two notes constituting the Shake must be struck first. When the note descends diatonically, the contrary order of alternation must be taken. In all other cases of passing Shakes it is better to begin on the principal note.

Before the Pupil enters upon the practice of the subjoined Exercises, it will be useful to impress upon the mind a few general rules, which cannot be too carefully attended to.

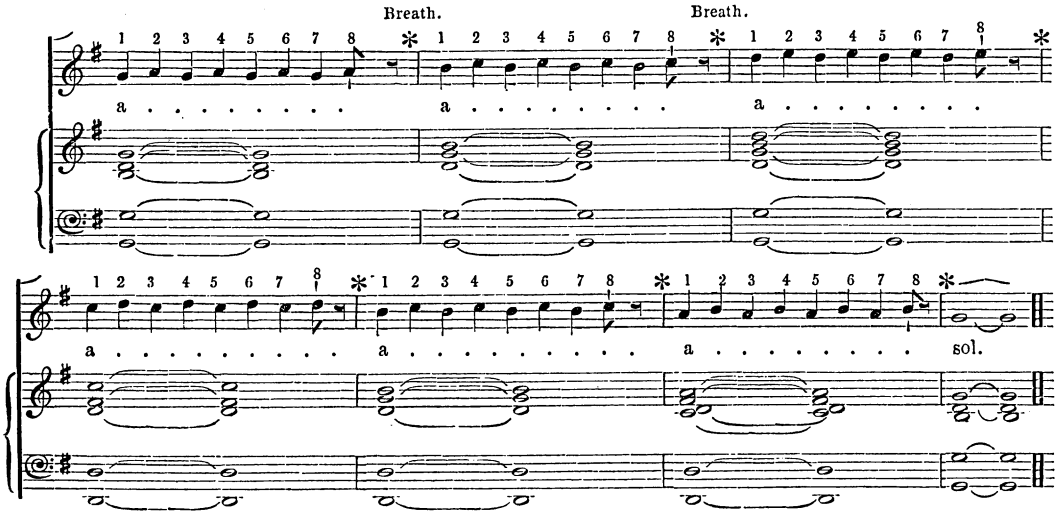
RULE 1ST.—The first requisite for obtaining a perfect and steady Shake is always to observe strict time in practising the Shake. It is the key-stone of all improvement, and the foundation of the system recommended in these pages; the necessity for it, therefore, cannot be too strongly urged. The advantage to be derived from it is this, that when once the habit is fixed by constant practice, the force of custom will so much prevail that the singer will never break down in the midst of the Shake from timidity.

RULE 2ND.—Do not hold a long note before commencing the Shake; it will prevent your having the power to make it either of sufficient duration or brilliancy.

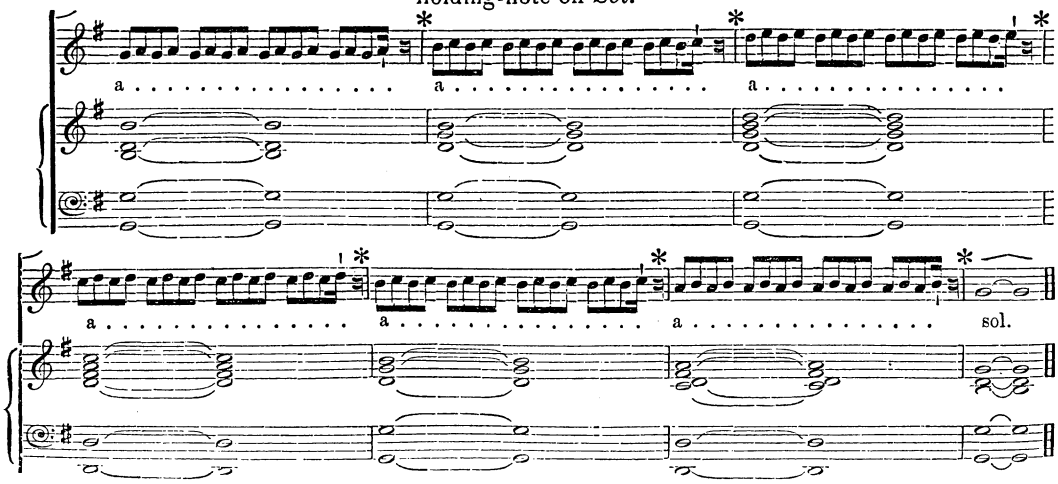
RULE 3RD.—In singing, accustom yourself to take breath wherever you can, although you may not feel the necessity for it at the time. This is important to beginners, as it teaches them soon to take it without exertion, and less perceptibly to the hearer. But do not take breath in the middle of a word, nor even in a musical phrase, if it can be avoided.

RULE 4TH.—Never exhaust the breath, but keep the chest full, which is the great means of increasing the power and smoothness of tone. Too much pains cannot be bestowed on this point.

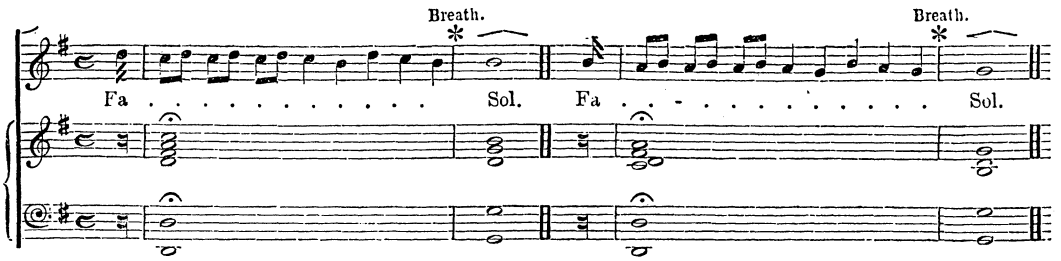
EXERCISE 1.—The Shake consists of two notes, to be sung in equal time; both the notes composing the Shake should be sung at first slowly and *very distinctly*, and in *strict time*. I would recommend the pupil at first to repeat the figures marked over each note, making the last note short or abrupt; take breath between each bar, and make a holding-note on *Sol*.



EXERCISE 2.—The time is increased in this exercise; take breath as in the first, making a holding-note on *Sol*.

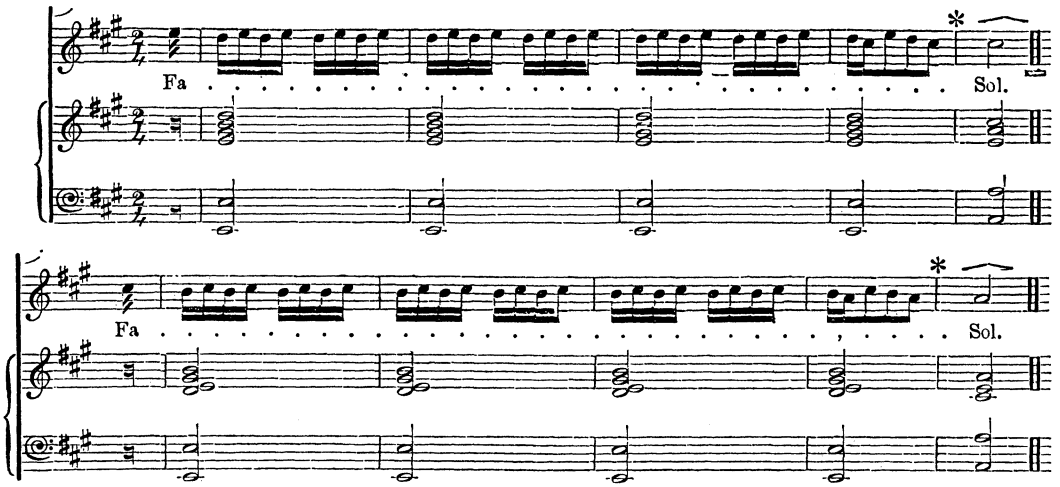


EXERCISE 3.



This Exercise should be practised, transposed into the neighbouring keys.

EXERCISE 4.



This Exercise should be practised, transposed into the neighbouring keys.

From the facility with which some, even untaught singers, spontaneously and without effort produce the Shake, persons not gifted with the same power are led to believe that it is a natural and not an acquired talent; and supposing it to depend upon some peculiar conformation of the organ, they either never attempt its acquisition, or, deterred by the difficulty at first experienced, they abandon it in despair. This is a common and a fatal error; for any one whose voice has acquired sufficient flexibility to run a simple division, may as certainly obtain a command over the Shake. The difficulty which so disheartens novices, who attempt the Shake without the aid and guidance of an instructor, arises altogether from the wrong method they pursue. They endeavour all at once to execute a close and rapid Shake, and in their abortive efforts to effect it, they generally either make a false interval, taking a third instead of a tone or semitone above the principal note; or, which is still more usual, they merely reiterate the same note with a kind of jerking cachinnation. They forget that every acquirement which results from practice must be won by slow and easy steps,—that we must walk before we run.

The Pupil who would learn to command a clear and steady execution of the Shake, must begin by practising it very slowly, gradually and almost imperceptibly accelerating the velocity from time to time, until the power is acquired of using the necessary degree of rapidity. Unless this cautious mode of proceeding be in the first instance rigidly adhered to, the Singer will never be secure of perfect intonation, or of a smooth and equable succession of the notes, but will be constantly liable to a break or flutter in the very middle of the passage. Besides, it is a mistake to suppose, as some people are apt to imagine, that the beauty of a Shake consists in its rapidity.

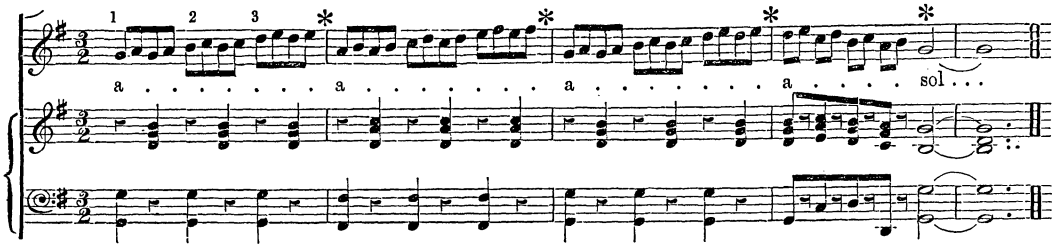
This grace, like other ornaments, is applicable to every varying style of expression, and must therefore be adapted to the character of the music in which it is employed.

In plaintive and tender passages, the movement must be gentle; a loud and rapid execution would quite destroy the effect. More impassioned music, on the other hand, demands quickness and brilliancy. In fact, it is susceptible of every shade of sentiment or passion, from the loud and fierce to the soft and pathetic, and both its volume and rapidity must be regulated in accordance.

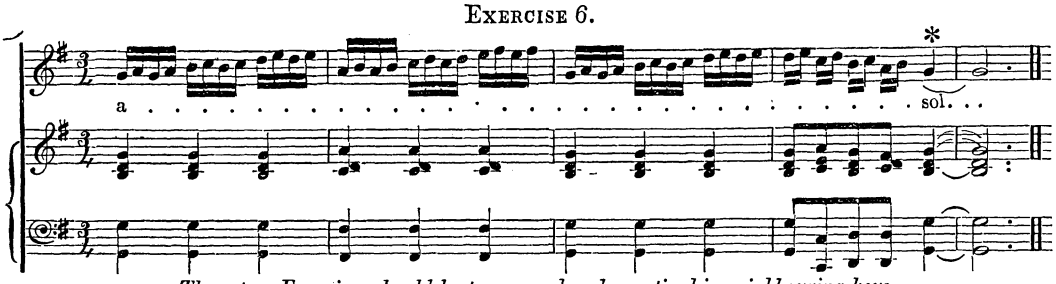
There are two faults which singers who have obtained a full command over the Shake are apt to fall into, and it may be as well to mention

them here, by way of caution to those who have acquired a proficiency in the art. The one is introducing the Shake too frequently,—overloading the composition, and satiating the hearers, with an utter disregard to all propriety: the other is making the Shake too close and rapid, so that it loses all expression, and degenerates into mere "sound and fury, signifying nothing." The cultivation of a pure taste is the only preventive to such errors as these.

Exercise 5.—When you begin to practice this exercise, take the first of every beat with force; but as you find the passage become easier, endeavour to pass smoothly to each beat; when you feel that you can sing it with ease and precision, then try it more rapidly.



Exercise 6.



These two Exercises should be transposed and practised in neighbouring keys.

For examples of Shakes as they occur in different Compositions, see the Folio edition of this work.

CRYSTAL PALACE.

The Orphèonist Festival commenced on the 25th of June, and was continued on the 26th and 28th. The "Orphèon" is an amateur choral association of some standing in France. Its central head is established in Paris, with branches extending into all the departments of the country. It is stated that there are now 800 societies, and more than 30,000 members, and there is hardly a commercial or manufacturing town in France that has not some "Societé Musicale" in union with it. This association is evidently on a much larger scale than any existing in England, for though we have choral societies by the thousand, including almost every village in the country, there is no connection between them. The Orphèonistes combine charity with music, and during the last five years they have handed over a large sum of money to various charitable institutions. In this respect it is easy to see the advantage that might be derived from combination. No doubt there are innumerable charities forwarded and assisted by the efforts of musicians in England, but a combined society extending throughout the country would have considerable power in collecting charitable contributions. The anniversaries of the Orphèonistes have been events of national importance, and have always excited immense interest in Paris and in the larger towns of France. The 3000 singers who made their appearance at the Crystal Palace are selections from these various societies, and are composed, we are told, of the commercial classes—shopkeepers, clerks, artizans, and others; indeed, it was evident from their general appearance that the artizans were in considerable force, which proves how much the study of music is extending in France.

The programme on Monday commenced with "God save the Queen," sung in very intelligible English; the harmonies, it is true, were much altered, and not for the better, but the good-will with which the National Anthem was sung made up for any defects in the execution. The next piece performed was a hymn, "Veni Creator," by Besozzi, and very correctly and smoothly it was sung; other slow and solemn music was included in the day's performance, and though well sung there was nothing distinctive about the style. It was, however, in the characteristic French music that the great effect was produced. The striking beauty of the *piano* passages, the distinct enunciation of the words, and the neat and crisp execution of the quick passages, were exceedingly good. There is no great power in the *forte* passages, not like the depth of sound produced, for instance, by a few hundred of our North-country chorus singers, but there is a smoothness and precision which is extremely pleasant. We may also add that there is a certain amount of trick, that is decidedly effective; we allude particularly to a chorus called "La Retraite," in which the sound of drums, imitated by the voices, is first heard in the distance, then a chorus advancing and subsequently receding into distance, so as to become almost inaudible. This was remarkably good, and without speaking of it as fine chorus singing, it would be well worth imitating. Another excellent chorus was "France! France!" composed especially for this festival by Ambroise Thomas. The spirit and vivacity with which this patriotic song was given produced an immense effect. Several others of the same class, which we have not space to mention, were equally good.

The programme each day was varied, and the performance gave universal satisfaction. At the conclusion of the music the audience rose *en masse*, and with waving of hats, and every demonstration of good feeling, called vociferously for the French National Melody, whereupon "Partant pour La Syrie" was given with hearty goodwill by the singers. The band of the Guides, who have accompanied the Orphèonistes, and who performed at the Crystal Palace each day, were in London in the year

(Continued on page 303.)